

# EVENING WORLD REVIEWS TAX RETRENCHMENT ISSUE FOR CHAMBERLAIN BRUERE

**If City Department Heads Are All Dishonest, Mr. Bruere Is Right—Millions Wasted on This Theory—Board of Aldermen, Too, Might Add Further Engineers to Oversee Present Force, Following Mr. Bruere's Idea.**

In answer to City Chamberlain Henry Bruere's comments on The Evening World's series of lessons to taxpayers, informing them how their money is spent and wasted, The Evening World freely states that the devotion to the public of Mr. Bruere and his associates in the city administration has not been questioned. The taxpayers of the city, burdened beyond the point of necessity, should have naught but admiration for Mr. Bruere, who has publicly stated that he is drawing \$12,000 a year salary for a superfluous job.

The point raised by The Evening World, which nobody has disputed, is that New York is faced with a taxation crisis which imperils real estate values and securities. Immediate relief in the shape of a more equitable distribution of the taxation burden is required.

Therefore a discussion of Mr. Bruere's suggestion of a commission form of government would be out of place because there exists such a wide difference of opinion concerning commission government that it cannot be considered as a medium of immediate relief; furthermore, such a discussion would detract public attention from the real issue, which is prompt and drastic readjustment of taxation.

The Evening World is pleased to note that Mr. Bruere, in offering his remedy, has fully admitted and emphasized just what this newspaper

could more forcibly illustrate the imperative need of control by a city of its own business than the present acute tax situation in New York, which the city is powerless to relieve, under existing conditions, because of legislative restrictions.

Mr. Bruere says that The Evening World, in its effort to instruct and educate taxpayers has failed "to do justice to the progress already made and has done injustice to effective constructive steps already taken." By this he means that The Evening World has criticized certain measures undertaken by the Administration.

Mr. Bruere's personal relations to these measures is very close and he allows these personal relations to so cloud his vision that he fails to discern the logic of the position taken by The Evening World. As to appreciation of the meritorious acts of public officials no newspaper has more completely chronicled and upheld the efforts of the present city administration to improve conditions. In its various activities in the direction of civic betterment—such as, for instance, its fight for relief from exorbitant tax rates—The Evening World has been accorded the wholehearted support of the administration and it is governed by the friendliest feelings when it points out the opportunities the authorities have before them for accomplishing still greater results for the benefit of the tax-ridden public.

It is probably because of Mr. Bruere's active part in the creation of Board of Estimate Bureaus and his personal interest in the members of their staffs that "The Board of Estimate" through these bureaus has year after year, with increased effectiveness challenged every request of department heads.

**HOW GROUPS WORKING AT CROSS PURPOSES ARE CREATED.** If this statement means anything it means that the department heads who are required by law to protect the public interests, fail to do so. The board of departments would not be a board of departments if it did not entertain toward the Board of Estimate the same feeling toward them. We have, therefore, under this system of government, two official groups, working at cross purposes, each group charging the other with responsibility for the failure of any result, the result itself always being a compromise of personal opinion and not a deliberate conclusion based on fact.

**ALL AGREE CITY SHOULD CONDUCT ITS OWN BUSINESS.**

Mr. Bruere's assertion that "release from State control" is essential to a successful reorganization of the City Government upon a genuine business basis cannot be disputed. Nothing

## THE EVENING WORLD'S RETRENCHMENT SUGGESTIONS.

Postpone the construction of the Schoharie Extension and combine the Board of Water Supply with the Department of Water, Gas and Electricity, at a salary saving of.....	\$250,000
Eliminate, by postponement of the Schoharie Extension, the necessity for a bond issue of \$200,000, thereby effecting a saving, in interest, of.....	1,000,000
Reduce the engineering payroll of the Public Service Commission at a saving of.....	1,000,000
Turn over to the State and have the State pay for the regulatory functions of the First District Public Service Commission at a saving of.....	500,000
Wipe out duplications in work done by Board of Estimate Bureaus and save the taxpayers....	400,000
Abolish the Audit Bureau of the Comptroller's office and save.....	300,000
Consolidate all the scattered and overlapping engineering forces of the city at a saving of....	1,500,000
Merge the Department of Bridges with other city departments, thereby reducing administration and engineering charges	200,000
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>\$5,310,000</b>

No expenditure of public moneys is justified which is not founded on facts and data that are a matter of exact knowledge. Competent officials will produce the same facts for the head of a department as they would for the Board of Estimate and vice versa. Therefore, The Evening World's contention that all technical information should be gathered and furnished by one central organization for all branches of the city government—for the Board of Estimate as well as for the Borough Presidents and the heads of departments—is logically sound and entirely practicable.

What is of more importance, it would save the city millions of dollars annually and the saving would begin immediately.

Mr. Bruere says the Board of Estimate bureaus have paid for themselves a hundredfold. This is a general statement, entitled to consideration only if Mr. Bruere can show that other officials, doing the same work and given full responsibility, would not have accomplished the same result. It might aid Mr. Bruere to see the question exactly the same way if he would pause and consider that everything he says about the justification of the Board of Estimate bureaus could be said, with equal force and truth, in favor of the establishment of similar bureaus for the Board of Aldermen.

**LONG ON ANALYSES, SHORT ON REASONS, FOR 'PAY-AS-YOU-GO.'**

Mr. Bruere's analysis of the fundamental causes of the enormous load of indebtedness resting on the city is none too strongly put, and his commendation of the current Administration's ultra conservative policy—of issuing corporate stock for non-revenue production improvements, is justified. But Mr. Bruere's explanation of the reasons which brought

about the abandonment of the old bond issue plan with its heavy interest charges are not entirely in accordance with the facts.

He would have stated the case more accurately, perhaps, had he said that the rapid approach of the city toward the debt limit, and the good sense of the Board of Estimate, which saw the folly of exhausting the city's borrowing capacity, brought about the change in financial policy, rather than the activities of the Bureau of Contract Supervision. Mr. Bruere does not tell the whole story of the adoption of the "pay-as-you-go" policy.

It is true that the retirement of a portion of city debt each year and the substitution of serial bonds for long term bonds with an amortized sinking fund, saves an immense amount in interest payments, but a similar saving could have been accomplished by other methods of funding long term bonds. It has been suggested that the change of policy was prompted by the desire of the Administration to reduce the margin of debt limit, so that the city could continue the financing of the rapid transit and dock improvements. If this was not the purpose and result of the conference which brought about the adoption of the "pay-as-you-go" resolution by the Board of Estimate on Sept. 11, 1914, The Evening World has been misinformed.

As to Mr. Bruere's defense of the expensive Bureau of Audits in the Department of Finance he states as an excuse for its existence the very fact which makes it expensive, impracticable and objectionable. "The work is not really checking bills," says Mr. Bruere, "but involves inspection of supplies and examination of contract work."

Does not this statement show that the bureau exists because of the belief in some quarters that employees in the several departments are dishonest? If they are dishonest the only remedy is to get rid of them. The Comptroller cannot stop dishonesty unless he is able to place one of his honest subordinates side by side with each subordinate in the several departments.

The expenditure of \$300,000 for Comptroller's examiners, inspectors and engineers produces no other result than the ordinary process of audit will produce. The investigation of a questionable claim by any Comptroller and the detection of an offender has a wholesome effect on all

business in the department involved. The big Bureau of Audits can accomplish no more than this. The theory of the Bureau of Audits is plausible, but the practice means only so many more jobs.

**FINANCIAL SYSTEM FOUND WANTING IN DOCK DEPT.**

In preparing his able laudation of the City Administration Mr. Bruere failed to grasp the significance of the present state of the public mind, which is not concerned with what has been done but is eagerly waiting for something to be done by the City Administration as well as by the State Legislature. Mr. Bruere emphasizes the fact that the Dock Department has an appropriation in the budget of 1916 and had none in 1909. Unconsciously he emphasizes one of the defects in present administrative finance. The Dock Department was and ought to be self-sustaining, and the policy that makes the city contribute in taxes toward the upbuilding of private enterprise can scarcely be called wise.

Returning to the public, which considers what has been done as a duty performed and awaits action demanded by existing conditions, The Evening World is showing larger and broader achievements which remain to be accomplished. The Evening World has stated more emphatically than Mr. Bruere the effect that the enormous city debt and the growth of educational expenses have had upon the tax rate. It has pictured in no uncertain language the tyranny of the Legislature at Albany, which imposed on the city close to \$14,000,000 of an unnecessary direct tax.

But, with the elements of growing debt service and educational costs and direct tax eliminated, the fact stands out that the administrative expenses of the city have increased approximately \$15,000,000 since the McClellan Administration, and that Administration was not frugal. Whatever the excuse or explanation of the increase, the situation must be faced. The Evening World has pointed out and Mr. Bruere admits the defects in the City Government which are responsible for a large part of the present expense.

Overlapping duties should not exist. The great pay-roll army should not be so large. The duplication of part of it should be eliminated. Experiments and improvements which look to the future for their justification should be abandoned.

Mr. Bruere, instead of meeting the present has found it necessary to defend the past. He is mistaken if he thinks the public is greatly interested in his defense. The city demands responsibility and frugality in public expenditure, and cares little by what method or what personnel they are secured.

The Evening World takes due note of Mr. Bruere's assertion that his conclusions are ungrounded and its facts in many particulars, are wrong. Mr. Bruere, after more extended thought, will probably reverse his judgment on this point, for if there is anything in his proposition of centralization in the City Government, it exists in the amount of official routine and red tape it would destroy.

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